



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Modern Philology

VOLUME XVII

June 1919

NUMBER 2

THE PROBLEM IN WILBRANDT'S *MEISTER VON PALMYRA*

In 1889, the very year in which Hauptmann produced *Vor Sonnen-
aufgang* and Arno Holz brought out *Die Familie Selicke*, the two plays
which marked the capture of the German stage by naturalism, there
was acted a work which foreshadowed the downfall of the very
literary movement then just coming into its own. Adolf Wilbrandt's
Der Meister von Palmyra was one of the first of those symbolic and
idealistic works which came as a natural reaction to the *Alkoholiker-
dramen* of the eighties and early nineties, which Hauptmann himself
adopted in *Hanneles Himmelfahrt* and *Die Versunkene Glocke*, and
which, spreading to every land, have reached their highest develop-
ment in the plays of Maeterlinck. *Der Meister von Palmyra* is
philosophical in theme, poetic in treatment, and far from dramatic
in structure, yet the strength of the underlying idea and the beauty
and stage-mastery with which it is worked out unite to make it a
play popular not only with a limited class of readers as a closet-
drama, but also a success when competently produced behind the
footlights. That Wilbrandt has succeeded in a theme so beset with
difficulties is a tribute both to his own genius and to the perspicacity
of the audiences before whom it has been presented.

Though it in no sense degenerates into didacticism, *Der Meister
von Palmyra* is most strongly a *Tendenzstück*. Unlike the model which
certain critics hold up, it originates in and develops around a central

problem. That Wilbrandt has succeeded in reducing one more artistic canon to the dust it deserves is due not only to his own power, but also to the grandeur and the far-reaching importance of the theme to which he has subordinated his characters. For the problem in *Der Meister von Palmyra* is the fundamental problem which has troubled every thoughtful man since the first human being, perched in the tree tops, thought reflectively at all; it is the problem which has lain at the base of every philosophy and religion since time began. It is the perennial, ever-propounded problem which each of us must solve in the depths of his own heart as best he can: it is the great problem of life and death.

What makes the play so interesting and helpful to us is the fact that the poet actually lived through the experiences recorded in his pages; the solution that he gives is a thoughtful man's answer to the riddle of the universe as it has presented itself to him through long years of experience. It is the crystallization of all his thought and poetry, handled with the best technique at his command, and as such deservedly marks the highest point of his genius. *Der Meister von Palmyra* could only have sprung from a varied spiritual experience based on intellectual foundations as broad as Wilbrandt's.

At twenty-two a Doctor of Philosophy, a jurisconsult and a philologist, an expert in Roman law and in languages and literatures, in Hegelian philosophy and in Egyptology, in the history of art and in the history of man, he was, from 1859 to 1880, a publicist, a journalist, and a playwright. With the publication of his novel *Geister und Menschen* dates the beginning of his literary work. *Arria und Messalina* and *Nero*, two Roman plays, first brought him into prominence as a dramatist, and led to his engagement in 1881 as the director of the Vienna Burgtheater, where he produced more Roman dramas and German patriotic pieces.

This practical theatrical experience, though of inestimable value to his technique, became irksome to his poet's soul, and in 1887 he resigned his position. Rejoicing in his new-found freedom, Wilbrandt spent the next summer in the romantic Salzkammergut, at picturesque Hallein. Here, in the companionship of his friends Franz Lenbach and Reinhold Begas, he meditated much on the subject nearest his heart, and one night, looking up at the innumerable starry

points twinkling in the black-arched dome of the heavens, he resolved to write a drama on the great mystery of life and death. His theatrical experience had taught him that any subject, if but handled aright, was possible upon the stage; and in 1889 *Der Meister von Palmyra* was the result.

The great problem of the play is the problem which Life feels when it comes into contact with Death. There is in mankind a strong, firmly rooted attachment to life. Few of us have as yet come to sympathize with Hardy's "coming universal desire not to live." Man is willing, if in a healthy state of mind, to struggle to the utmost to preserve the divine spark within his breast. Athwart this deep-seated instinct of the human soul falls the black shadow of death. Man is limited in existence to the brief span of three score years and ten; then he must die, no matter what his rank, his power, or his desserts. From the beginning of time thoughtful men have moralized upon this inevitable factor in human existence. In Tennyson's noble words,

Man comes, and tills the field, and lies beneath.

This seems to comprise the life of man; it is essentially the same for all, whether embodied in a moralizing Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes* or in the drama of an Andreyev. Death is the final goal of Life.

The great problem has been, therefore, to reconcile these two seemingly incompatible facts. Man's spirit stubbornly refuses to concede that death ends all, and religions and philosophies have sprung up to explain away death. Why does it exist? Is it the end? The first of these problems Wilbrandt explains in the only possible way, by dwelling on the necessity of death. Eternal physical life in this world would be impossible. To exemplify this he gives us the character of Apelles, who has the boon of eternal existence. Empires rise and fall, religions change, generations are born, grow to manhood, and pass away; Apelles remains the same. And what has he for his pains? A living death! Life without progress is not life at all; Death must exist.

Having disposed of the first question by showing the absolute necessity for physical death, Wilbrandt advances another step. Does

the necessary *Sorgenlöser*, Death, defeat forever the soul's cry for continued existence? Wilbrandt answers in a decided negative. He attempts no elaborate elucidation of this point; the absolute certainty with which he expects some form of future life is based upon the inward conviction of the soul. Thus, when Apelles in the first scene asks Zoë whether she is certain of immortality:

Wirfst du so leicht das sichre Leben hin
 Für das, was niemand kennt? Die blühnde Jugend,
 Der Glieder Kraft und Schönheit, Aug' und Ohr
 Und Fühlen, Denken, Lieben für ein dunkel,
 Geträumt "Vielleicht"? (Browning's "Grand Perhaps")

Zoë's firm answer is:

Dir mag es dunkel sein, mir nicht.

And in the last act, when Apelles' spiritual development is complete, he also scorns the fool whose only cry is, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die." Life persists after the grave in some form. But in what?

There are only two views possible: continued existence apart from this life, in a static condition, or reincarnation in some form of physical and progressive existence; the third, the Buddhistic Nirvana, in which the soul is reabsorbed into the world-spirit, is not immortality in the ordinary sense. Which of these two shall we accept? The first has been the traditional view of Christianity; the second, that of the great religions of the East. To modern eyes there seems at first glance little doubt as to which is preferable. But Wilbrandt says no; the only logical and satisfactory conception of immortality is reincarnation. Hence he introduces, as a contrast to Apelles, the figure of one soul appearing in a different guise in each act, first as the Christian martyr Zoë, then the Roman courtesan Phoebe, then Christian Persida, the youth Nymphas, and, last of all, Zenobia. She is the true immortality,

Abbild des ewig neugeformten Lebens.

Life as constant, active progress is opposed to the stagnation, on the one hand, of the foolish desire to live forever in this life, represented by Apelles, and on the other, of the life of eternal bliss which the church has offered, represented in the play by the doctrines of early Christianity.

What, then, does *Der Meister von Palmyra* offer us on the philosophical side? First of all, an ideal, poetical, immanent world-spirit or over-soul, exhibiting itself in this life in man:

Und all die Menschenseelen sind verschieden
 Gefärbte Gläser, die der eine Geist
 Des Lebens—nenn ihn, wie du willst—durchleuchtet.
 Der steht, unsichtbar, hinter jeglichem,
 Sein wahres Ich, und lebt in uns sein Leben.

So much for God; as for the immortal soul of man,

Sollt' es dauern, müsst' es
 Im Wechsel blüh'n, wie du! von Form zu Form
 Das enge Ich erweiternd, füllend, läuternd,
 Bis sich's in reinem Licht verklärt. So könnten wir
 Vielleicht, allmählich, Gott entgegenreifen.

We have an example of this true immortality in the quintuple figure of the heroine who shows the false earthly eternal life, personified in Apelles, its mistake, and opposes the equally false Christian eternal heavenly bliss, which is merely Apelles transferred to another sphere. Such is the philosophic import, the plot of ideas.

It is hard for us, to be sure, not to laugh at this ludicrous idea of metempsychosis; it is really too preposterous for a modern German to hold it up as an ideal. Still, we must recognize that in times gone by it has been one of the vital philosophic beliefs. Indeed, the great Asiatic religions of Brahminism and Buddhism, comprising the majority of mankind, believe today in the transmigration of souls, and even in Europe and this country, where we profess to be enlightened, it flourishes as one of the cardinal doctrines of the theosophists. Hence after all, because of its wide extent in the past and even today, it merits more attention than has ordinarily been given it by modern scholars.

Belief in the teaching variously denominated as reincarnation, transmigration, or metempsychosis, is almost as old as mankind. We find the earliest peoples holding that the human soul, when it leaves this body in death, reappears on earth once more in the form of some new-born babe; in the lowest peoples, and in the exoteric practice of some of the higher, the belief is that the soul can reappear in the body of an animal. But such perversions of the doctrine we

must in all fairness exclude from any philosophic consideration; it is as unfair to judge it from the belief of the Hindu coolie as it would be to judge Christianity from the practice of a southern negro, rather than to try to penetrate into its esoteric principles.

In fact, in the ancient world, whoever made any pretense to intellectual power rejected the joyless life of the shades, which constituted the popular hereafter for the Greek and Roman, and if he believed in any life to come, he adopted some form of metempsychosis. The Orphic cults, which played so important a rôle in the religious life of Hellas, gained much of their power from the metempsychosis doctrine that they offered their initiates. Pythagoras reveled in it; and we all know the wonderful use to which Plato put it, in his Myth of Er and elsewhere. Among classic philosophers, Empedocles, Vergil, Philo, the neo-Pythagoreans, the neo-Platonists, Origen, the Gnostics, and the Manichaeans adhered to some form of transmigration. The ancient religions of the world nearly all embody it: the Persian Magi, the gymnosophists of India, the Druids, the bardic triads of the Welsh, the priestly rites of Egyptian Isis, the Eleusinian mysteries of Greece, the Bacchic processions of Rome, the cabalistic rituals of the Hebrews, the religions of Peru and Mexico—all are imbued with the teaching. And even today, it prevails in India, Burma, Tibet, China, and Japan. In fact, it is hardly exaggeration to say that, with the exception of those peoples who have come under the domination of Christianity, belief in metempsychosis has been and is well-nigh universal.

Nor has it been absent in Christians. Some of the greatest philosophers have adhered to the theory; Bruno, Kant, Schelling, and Fichte accepted it. Hume himself says: "The soul, if immortal, existed before our birth. Metempsychosis is the only system of immortality that Philosophy can hearken to." Schopenhauer's philosophy included palingenesis as one of its cardinal principles; he calls it "the natural conviction of Man so soon as he reflects freely." Lessing defends it in his *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*; Herder professed it; Goethe's *Erdgeister* sing of it.

Among poets especially the belief has been very prevalent. Whit-tier, Aldrich, Longfellow, Lowell, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Rossetti, Coleridge, Browning, Shelley, Emerson—these are but a few who

have hearkened to its call. We may well close our survey of its extent with America's greatest poet, who sings:

As to you, Life, I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths.
No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.
I know I am deathless.

In the face of this imposing array, we can better appreciate the importance of the solution Wilbrandt gives to the problem of death. It is one of the great answers of the ages, excluded from our thought only because of the force of traditional Christianity. It is coming more and more to the fore now; it has already left the domain of theoretical metaphysical speculation and appeared in popular form in *The Star-Rover* of Jack London, in the novels of Algernon Blackwood in England, in Flammarion's works in France, and here in Wilbrandt's *Meister von Palmyra* in Germany.

Upon closer examination the doctrine of reincarnation does hold forth great plausibility. The highest human spirits have demanded a something after this life. Almost without exception the great philosophers and the great poets are united in the contention that the cessation of the physical life does not mean the end of the spiritual. If you once grant any kind of immortality, it follows with logical precision that Hume was right, and metempsychosis must be adopted. If the soul is to live forever after death, it must have lived forever before birth. What is eternal life that excludes the eternity before the present? Science itself contends for it. The cardinal principle of the physical universe is the law of the conservation of energy. If we are to apply this to the spiritual realm also, it means of necessity that the vital principle exhibiting itself as consciousness must exist in some form after it departs from the body, and it must have existed before. If, on the other hand, the law of the conservation of energy does not hold in the spiritual realm, then there must be spiritual laws which do; and the strongest of these is the continuity of personality. Granted the animism on which immortality depends, reincarnation would seem to be most in accord with scientific principles.

The modern conception of life is essentially one of growth. Life absolutely static is impossible to conceive. Modern scientific thought offers us life as a progress, an evolution from lower to higher, steadily approaching an unattainable goal. And this is exactly what

reincarnation offers on the spiritual side. An ego, eternally existent, a manifestation of the Divine, what Wilbrandt calls "ein gefärbtes Glas, das der eine Geist des Lebens durchleuchtet," gradually evolves through many existences until at length it resides as the soul of a man. After the physical garment wears out, is this ego to be lifted at once to flowery beds of ease, or doomed to eternal torture? Both mediaeval conceptions are alike repugnant to modern thought. The soul must continue to progress after this life.

To exemplify this false theory of future life, Wilbrandt introduces the Christian fanatics, and, in a symbolic sense, the living death of Apelles himself. The hero realizes, at last, his folly, and cries aloud:

So wie die Geister von Gestorbenen, die
Man nicht begrub, die Todesstätte, sagt man,
Ruhlos umkreisen, so umwand'r ich, ein
Lebendig Toter!

The heaven of Zoë, the heaven which inspires the fanaticism of Herennianos, leader of the church at Palmyra, is presided over by a *Zornigott*; and Apelles says:

Das Heilige wird
In euch zum Wahnwitz, heiss wie Wüstenwind.

In fact, Wilbrandt's treatment of early Christianity is most fruitful. Its conception of immortality arose in response to a vital need of the peoples of the Roman Empire. With all initiative crushed by the repression of a vast military tyranny, life ceased to offer any attractions. Stoicism and Epicureanism arose to teach man to make the best of a very bad business; they brought escape from the outside world through withdrawal into the inner soul. Christianity, the Christianity of the Fathers, offered instead the hope of eternal happiness in another world. No wonder it far outstripped those sects which could offer only consolation in this world. So mediaeval Christianity became what Ruskin calls the great "Religion of Consolation." To the oppressed it made its appeal. They sought an escape from the world; Christianity offered them the dream of heaven. Hence the monasteries of the Middle Ages and hence their insolent criminals, their ascetic saints dreaming of eternal glory and their cruel tyrants oppressing, plundering, poisoning; hence all

of that curious religion which permitted the most unbounded evils to occur at a time when, probably, there were more spiritually minded men in the world than ever before. The Christianity of the church,

gleich dem Adler,
Der sich emporschraubt in das Blau des Himmels,
Bis er dem Aug' des Sterblichen entschwindet,

forgot the earth in contemplating heaven. Meanwhile, the Christianity of Jesus had practically died out with his disciples, overshadowed by the other and to that age greater interest of immortality introduced by the Greek Fathers; however, it is probable that without this adventitious element, Jesus himself would long ago have been forgotten. We are just beginning to realize today that the religion of Jesus has never yet been tried, and that the greatest misfortune that ever happened to Christianity has been the church and the theologians. As our own Edgar Lee Masters has said, Christ's message was just gaining headway when

Along came Paul, and nearly spoiled it all.

It is against such a deadening mediaeval conception of eternal bliss that Wilbrandt and reincarnation protest. The ego cannot die, but neither can it live statically. Any conception which takes the soul's interest from this world and makes life depend for its value on the hope of happiness hereafter, the very basis of which is false, is radically wrong, and any Christianity which depends for its support on such an erroneous doctrine is doomed. If immortality is to remain amid the simple teachings of human brotherhood and divine fatherhood which constituted the fundamentals of Christ's message, it must be in some other form than the "Christian's" heaven and hell.

What solution does reincarnation offer? It tells us that the soul, after completing one life, experiences another, and another, always rising in the scale and always approaching the ideal, in accordance with the recognized principles of evolution. Life is an opportunity for growth, a something to be grasped eagerly and experienced to the full. Just as the physical body of the child depends directly on what the physical experience of the ancestors has been, so the spiritual constitution of the reborn soul is directly affected by all the experiences of its past lives. Life is not something to escape from;

it is something to grow into. The better we live physically, the better will be the bodies of our offspring; the nobler we live spiritually, the nobler will be our characters in the next life. "Salvation" becomes, not getting saved from "original sin," but developing character, growing nobler; every man has to be "saved" from the self he is when he enters the world by leaving it a nobler being. The best way of growing is the way of Jesus: unselfish service for others.

This conception is inherently probable because it explains many hitherto inexplicable facts of life. It makes clear those intimations of a former life, which Wordsworth and multitudes of others have experienced. It explains genius and how a Mozart could compose operas at four, because of the long practice he had in former lives. But the most important problem it solves is the age-long riddle of evil. Evils and hardships are tests and formers of character; only as we live and learn can we fulfil our great duty of growing. What we are in this life depends upon what we were in the last, and what we shall be in the next depends upon what we do and learn in this.

So much for the probabilities of the case; modern philosophy tells us that no belief, such as immortality, incapable of logical or scientific proof or disproof, can be accepted if it does not pass the pragmatic test: are its results desirable? Those of the mediaeval immortality were not; hence "practical philosophy" has rejected the entire conception, in spite of the evidence in its favor. But reincarnation escapes this difficulty. It conserves the values both of a continued existence and of an intense interest in this life.

Against the old idea Apelles objects:

Ist alles,
Was wir bezeugen durch die Tat des Lebens,
Wie nicht getan?

In the play it is the old conception that leads to Zoë's martyrdom; it produces the tragedy of the fanatic Herennianos on Apelles' wife Persida. We are shown the folly to which it can lead, in theory to Apelles' living death, in practice to the fanaticism of the early Christians. Both of these difficulties reincarnation obviates; it provides a future life of growth, instead of stagnation, and it centers interest in this present life here and now, for the two are one and the same. This life is a future life for all of us, and our future life will

resemble this one. Hence, in the Life Spirit's charge to Zoë all those elements combine which would pragmatically force us to adopt Wilbrandt's theory:

Doch die du so leicht das Leben
Hingibst für den Traum des Himmels:
Dich, im Namen des Allmächt'gen,
Ruf' ich auf zu hohen Wundern,
Werkzeug du des ewigen Willens.
Wiederkehren wirst du! nicht
So, doch anders; Abbild des
Ewig neugeformten Lebens,—
Den zu führen, zu belehren,
Der in sich verharren will.

Reincarnation, then, as the belief of the majority of mankind, in the past and in the present, as the scientific, evolutionary conception of immortality, as the most probable solution of the great problem of evil, as the explanation of many of the questions which science gives up in despair, finally, as that belief which pragmatically unites all the values accruing from a belief in immortality with all the values resulting from the belief that our life must be measured by its activity in this world—reincarnation may be said to have a fairly strong case in its favor.

For purposes of illustrating his point and because of the inevitable limitations of the stage, Wilbrandt has, of course, narrowed down his conception to an impossible degree. There is no probability that even if souls should return to other bodies there could ever occur five successive reincarnations so close together in time or in space. Indeed, the probability, if we should accept the theory, is altogether against any soul ever returning to this particular world at all. The important part of Wilbrandt's message is not that we are likely to meet once more in other guises our lost loves, or to revisit the scenes of other lives; it is the fundamental consideration that any future life must be a life of growth, in conditions at least approximating those found on this globe.

Perhaps the best comment on the entire subject is that which Wilbrandt puts into the mouth of one of his characters, old Saltner, in his novel *Adams Söhne*: "Ob er recht hat mit seinem Glauben? Wer weiss es? Ich weiss nur, dass es gut ist, so zu leben, als hätte er

recht: uns so reif zu machen, wie wir irgend können, so menschlich, so gut zu werden, als in uns gelegt is."

We have thus far treated *Der Meister von Palmyra* purely as a philosophical work, as the exemplification of a powerful but somewhat strange idea. It is right that we have done so, for it is primarily for its philosophical interest that Wilbrandt wrote his drama and that it interests us. But there is also a second side to it, more important to some readers than the first: the *Meister von Palmyra* is also a work of art. Only extraordinary artistic ability could have made it the dramatic success that it has proved to be. Plays of so philosophic a nature are understood by few and appreciated by still fewer, so that the success it achieved is a triumph for Wilbrandt's technical skill.

There are immense difficulties in the plan as Wilbrandt conceived it. A play extending over a hundred years demands a large and confusing cast and is likely to lose interest. Each act is a small drama in itself, requiring an exposition, a plot, and a climax. There is the constant danger that the similarity in the acts, in each of which a new figure must be introduced and carried off by Pausanias, will become too monotonous. The author is more to be congratulated on the wonderful ease with which he has avoided these pitfalls incident to his self-imposed limitations than to be assailed for the essentially undramatic nature of his plot. Its very novelty and hazard lend it a charm. There is no preaching and no arguing on the stage. He hints at his thought, and develops it by illustration, but he gives no formal arguments. The reader is left to draw his own conclusions; the only place where the philosopher too far overshadows the poet is toward the end of the last act.

The scene is laid in Palmyra, the "Queen of the Desert," a most fitting and romantic locality for such a tale. The time, too, gives opportunity for introducing the many changes in life and religion which contrast with Apelles' static existence. Embracing the reigns of Diocletian, of Constantine, of Julian the Apostate and his successor, it shows us empires rising and falling, religions changing and persecuting, while the Master of Palmyra lives on unmoved.

The action opens after the city has been rebuilt, following its destruction by Aurelian, by the famous architect Apelles, "Meister von Palmyra." He is at the heyday of his fame; young, healthy,

happy, he enjoys life as only the true Greek can. He loves his fond mother and his native city, and is proud to live as its leader.

The scene opens near a cave in the desert just outside the city. Here dwells a powerful spirit who can dispense life at will. Occasionally, however, those who seek life from him are met instead by the Spirit of Death, Pausanias or *der Sorgenlöser*. Thither comes an aged couple, who, despite all the evils of life, despite blindness and decrepitude, still desire the boon of living. Thus at the very outset Wilbrandt introduces the theme of the play, the struggle of man against death, and hints at the solution. It is Pausanias who comes and asks the couple why they seek to prolong their miserable existence. But the old woman answers:

Man lebt doch, Herr, so gern. Und sterben ist
So schaurig.

And Pausanias gives the true answer to the longing for continual life here on earth:

Fallen muss das welke Laub,
Damit andres keim' und wachse!

This small incident at the very outset epitomizes the drama.

To this cave comes a young Christian, Zoë, bent on gaining a martyr's crown at Palmyra. She represents the ideal which would give up this world for another.

Apelles, the conquering hero who finds life sweet, in all the abandon of youth comes to beg that his joyous existence be made eternal. His companion, Longinus, already a thoughtful youth and a budding philosopher, warns him that fortune may change, but Apelles will listen to nothing; he wants Life, and will have it. The Spirit of Life, whom he evokes, also warns him:

Doch gib acht!
Leben ohne Ende kann
Reue werden ohne Ende.
Drum gib acht!

but he grants his request. Apelles is confident;

Arbeit und Genuss
Sind Zwillingsbrüder, eins im andern lebend;
Ich leb' in beiden, und sie hüten mir
Die Lust des Daseins.

The Spirit, having granted his wish, dooms him to eternal life:

An der Stirn gezeichnet wirst du
 Wachen ohne Schlaf des Todes—
 Allen Kindern dieser Erde
 Du ein Bildnis, du ein Beispiel,
 Das des Todes Lehre predigt,
 Das des Lebens Rätsel lichtet.

He then connects Zoë's doom inextricably with Apelles:

Folg ihm nach!
 Deinen Todesweg zu wandeln,
 Ihm zu künden sein Geschick.—
 Wandre du von Form zu Form,
 Strebend leichtbeschwingte Seele!
 Irre wandelnd, vorwärts schreitend,
 Und in jeder deiner Formen
 Ihm belegend, neu und fremd,
 Unbewusst dem Unbewussten—
 Bis sich Gottes Werk vollendet,—
 Folg den Männern nach Palmyra,
 Geh zu sterben!

This first scene is really the prelude to the play: it introduces the problem and the chief characters and forecasts the solution. There follow five separate actions, centering around the martyrdom of Zoë, the infidelity and death of Apelles' mistress Phoebe, the tragedy and death of his Christian wife Persida, the death of his grandson Nymphas in defense of the old gods; and, finally, the postlude, in which Zenobia meets the now world-weary Apelles and gives him death. In each act Pausanias appears, in one guise or another; until the last Apelles resolutely repels him. As time goes on the master is increasingly conscious of the identity of the five figures he loves, till in the last scene the truth bursts upon him. Like the Wandering Jew, doomed to walk the earth unceasingly, he finally comes to long for death, but only after all his friends have died and his grandson has been killed. Unlike the Wandering Jew, he does not sink to rest as a refuge from life forevermore, but drinks of the waters of Lethe only to return again in some other form:

O Wunderrätsel du, das meinen Weg
 So oft verwandelt kreuzte; holde Flamme
 Des vielgestaltigen Lebens! Nun erfass' ich

Des hohen Meisters Meinung,—ach, zu spät.
 Eng ist des Menschen Ich, nur eine kann es
 Von tausend Formen fassen und entfalten,
 Nur eine Strasse geh'n; drum tracht' es nicht
 Ins lebenwimmelnde Meer der Ewigkeit,
 Das Gott nur ausfüllt!—Sollt' es dauern, müsst' es
 Im Wechsel blüh'n, wie du! von Form zu Form
 Das enge Ich erweiternd, füllend, läuternd,
 Bis sich's in reinem Licht verklärt. So könnten wir
 Vielleicht, allmählich, Gott entgegenreifen.

The first episode, at the end of Act I, introduces to us a number of characters who pursue their course throughout the play, dying off one by one according to their respective ages. The most interesting is Apelles' steward Timolaos, whose shrewd insight and biting wit have earned for him the name of *die Nessel*. His wit is the only humor in the play; and it is generally too acrimonious to approach the comical. His remark on the Roman captain Saturninus, after he has just been most lavish in his praise of Apelles and Palmyra, aptly hits the point: "Ein kluger Mann, dieser Saturninus. Wie herablassend er uns schmeichelt. Kluge Schufte, die Römer!" And he well characterizes the two ambitious and selfish men whom we shall meet later: "Der ehrgeizige Julius Aurelius Wahballath mit dem neid-sauren Lächeln, und der schöne Septimius Malku, in dessen schmale Hand so viel Gold hineingeht und so wenig heraus—seine Freunde, die auf seinem Adlerrücken mit emporgeflogen sind."

Pausanias appears in the latter part of this scene, disguised as the minstrel whom Apelles had heard in camp, and his influence soon pervades the entire action. The reader can feel his presence, though he is not mentioned by name. Once more he warns Apelles of his rash desire for life, but to no avail. The act closes with a very dramatic action in which Zoë is stoned to death. The heated arguments between the heathen and Christian leaders give opportunity for the discussion of "Christianity's" ideals in those early days; they lend a naturalness to the scene. Another homely touch, which reveals Apelles' pride, is the way in which he protects Zoë from the mob until she assails his work and prophesies the fall of his temple—that is too much! Zoë dies cursing Apelles, while taciturn Pausanias stands by and says: "Du hast nun, was du wolltest."

The second episode takes place some twenty years later. Everyone, save Apelles, has changed. Rome is at her height, Constantine is on the throne, Christianity has triumphed. Aurelius and Septimius have risen to the first places in Palmyra and now despise Apelles, the ladder by which they climbed. Longinus, in middle age, is a mature philosopher; Timolaos' words are more biting than ever. The Master has been in Rome and returned with a beautiful courtesan, Phoebe. This long introduction is effected in the most natural manner and is worthy of Wilbrandt's best technique.

Phoebe is a beautiful creature of imperial Rome, sighing for her city, pouting, longing for the wealth and luxury to which she has been accustomed. A light, frivolous butterfly, there remain in her soul traces of a nobility recollected from her previous existence. When Timolaos' stinging remarks on the vacillation of Aurelius amid the changing religions arouse the latter's ire, so that he seizes the opportunity to charge Apelles with embezzlement, the Master, with the nobility of character accorded him throughout the play, resolves to pay the unjust amount though it ruin him. Phoebe struggles between her better self and her desire to run off with Septimius, who has tempted her with luxury and Rome. A dim sense of goodness seems to come back to her; she cajoles and flatters Apelles, who has discovered the plot, and in this instant he wonders:

Und warum mahnt mich diese Schläfrin, die
 Mein Herz berauscht, an jenes Kind des Todes?
 Als wär's derselbe Geist in beiden Formen?

He has been thinking of Zoë.

Phoebe soon gives way to Septimius, but falls sick and is claimed by the physician Pausanias. Although bereft of loved ones and wealth, Apelles is still firm in his defiance of death. This second episode is one of the best in the play. The tender lines with which Phoebe is drawn, the noble portrayal of Apelles, the gibes of Timolaos, the "Pelican philosopher," Longinus—all make it of great dramatic interest in itself.

Episode three opens. Christianity is firm. Rome has fallen, and Constantinople is now the seat of empire. Aurelius is Wabballath once more, Septimius is Malku; otherwise they are little changed. Timolaos, now old, has been converted. "Wir gehen alle nach

Brot," he remarks, "und das Brot wird christlich." Longinus is the wise old father of Jamlichus; Apelles is married to a Christian wife, Persida. But now the curse begins to take effect, for, fixed in bodily vigor, he is also static mentally; his whole being has stopped growing. A living death is approaching. Still clinging to the old gods, he builds basilicas for the Christians, who, outwardly honoring his talent, inwardly despise him. But he prides himself on this very fatal defect in his character:

Hier steh' ich—grau, nicht alt; im festen Bau
Unsterblich Mark, so scheint es; doch erfahren,
Beruhigt, weise—Lieb' und Leidenschaft
Dämmern so ferne—und der Zeiten Hammer
Rings um mich schmiedet eine neue Welt.

Persida is a second, matured Zoë; her experience as Phoebe has done wonders. Her husband meditates:

Wie du der Phoebe glichst; doch ernster, edler—
Doch auch ein heimlich Feuer tief im Aug'.

He seems to see Phoebe in her, she feels her kinship herself; while even her brother notices something strange about her. As she develops spiritually, she is coming to remember more and more of her past existences.

Across the story falls the black shadow of Christianity. On top now, it is persecuting in its turn; old Herennianos can flatter Apelles in one breath, while in the next he is plotting to place his daughter in a cloister, take away his wife, and kill him himself. The clash comes when Apelles wishes his Christian daughter to marry the pagan son of his old friend Longinus. Herennianos interferes, and the struggle in Persida between love for Apelles and devotion to the fanatical ideal of the church kills her. She is conquered by Pausanias, but Apelles keeps his Tryphena and defies death to his face:

Gespenst des Abgrunds!—
Du auch hier? Rabe, der das Opfer wittert?—
Bin ich unsterblich, bin ich stark wie du,
Bin Herr des Todes! Nieder, Höllegeist,
Auf deine Kniee!

The irony is all the more poignant because the death he despises is the living death which stares him in the face; actual death is the true *Sorgenlöser*.

The best of the third act is the stirring scene where the fanatic mob seeks to tear Tryphena from Apelles' arms. Amid the most dramatic action Wilbrandt brings out the base ends to which the theological immortality of the church can descend.

In the fourth episode Longinus alone, of all Apelles' friends, is left, now a hoary graybeard. The Master, a goatherd now in the mountains, is still happy: "Zeitlos leben, wie wir, ist des Menschen Glück! Streit und Not hatten wir genug; lange, ruhlose Irrfahrt durch der Menschen Länder! Hier krächzt uns die Sorge nicht an, und die Wünsche schlafen." He has come to the Stoic ideal. At the same time he has almost realized the true form of eternal life:

Seit ich wie die Adler lebe, die Welt von oben betrachte, besuchen mich in stillen Nächten wunderliche Gedanken. Nicht wiederkommen? Warum? Die Weisen in Indien sagen: wir werden sein—und sind schon gewesen! Langsam, sagen sie, reift der Menscheng Geist, nicht in Einem Leben. Um gottähnlich zu werden, muss er durch viele und mannigfaltige Gestalten gehen. . . . Warum könnt's nicht sein?—Wenn ich zuweilen daliege und mir sage: Wer war wohl jene Zoë, mit dem Geisterblick? Und Phoebe, und Persida—wanderte in ihnen Zoës Seele weiter? Und du, mein Nymphas, mein Liebling—hätte ich auch dich schon gekannt?—Zuweilen ist mir, als hätte ich dich schon gekannt.

Nymphas, Apelles' grandson, is the form that the reincarnated soul takes this time. Young, fresh manhood is his, as charming in his way as Zoë and Phoebe were in theirs. He is all fire, vigor, idealism. All of Apelles' love is concentrated in this boy; but Pausanias, now a Greek musician, appears, and we know that he is doomed. *Der Sorgenlöser* sings:

Also will's der ewige Zeus: du musst nun
Niedersteigen under die blühende Erde,
Musst die dunkle Persephoneia küssen,
Schöner Adonis.

Julian the Apostate is on the throne; the old gods are about to be restored. With all the fire of youth Nymphas enters into the plot. Apelles, grown wise, asks: "Kind! O Kind! Wollt ihr das Rad zurückdrehen?" Julian dies, the spirited attack fails, and Nymphas is killed in Apelles' arms. At last he turns to death as a solace:

So will ich sterben! So verfluch' ich
Dies Leben, das nicht endet!—Tod! wo bist du!

Zeig' mir dein Angesicht! Kannst du ihn töten,
 So töte mich mit ihm!—Heran, ihr alle;
 Hier biet' ich euch die unbewahrte Brust—
 Hier, hier! stosst zu!

But it is useless; he cannot die.

In the fifth episode Apelles has become a second Wandering Jew. He passes mournfully among the ruins of the once proud city of Palmyra, and in a long and impassioned address begs release from the troubles of life:

Longinus starb,—ich nicht! Die Müden sterben,
 Die Weinenden, die Lachenden—Geschlechter
 Und Völker sterben—Tempel stürzen nieder—
 Ich nicht! Ich nicht! Wie Mond und Sterne rollt
 Mein Leben weiter; hoch am Himmel steht
 Geschrieben: "ewig!" und durchflammt die Nacht,
 In der ich ruhlos wandre.

Pausanias appears to taunt him with his former defiance, but Apelles answers:

Nur der kann leben, der in andern lebt,
 An andern wächst, mit andern sich erneut.

But Pausanias cannot help him; only the woman who damned him can unseal his doom.

She appears as Zenobia, a Christian saint, surrounded by worshippers. At last the two souls recognize each other. "Intimations of immortality" flit through Zenobia's brain; and at length all is clear to Apelles. He realizes that true life must be progress upward, in varying forms and under varying guises. The theme of the play receives its last expression, and Zenobia releases Apelles finally to the waiting Pausanias.

There is one charge that has been brought against Wilbrandt, that he should have made Apelles receive eternal happiness together with health and strength, and converted him to a longing for death purely by the monotony of a static, timeless, subjective existence. Unfortunately, this mode of treatment would be impossible on the stage. As it is, I think Wilbrandt has made his point sufficiently clear. Apelles is happy until he drifts out of the onsweeping stream of mankind. It is his inability to advance to Christianity that causes

his first real unhappiness, while the culminating blow is merely the fact that he has outlived all his friends. How, I should like to ask, could Apelles wish death if he never became unhappy or dissatisfied with life?

I think I have sufficiently pointed out the beauties and value of *Der Meister von Palmyra* as a piece of dramatic literature. I trust that I have made it clear why, at least, Wilbrandt could have believed in the theory of reincarnation so strongly as to write a play upon the subject. But even if we do not sympathize with his solution of the world-old problem of life and death, *Der Meister von Palmyra* will still hold a great message for us. It is possible to interpret the play in a sense entirely symbolical. Life is constant, progressive activity. Apelles then symbolizes the false idea of life, which seeks to isolate itself from all others, to live for and in itself, to drift out of the on-flowing current of mankind and live in a static condition. Such a life would be truly death. Zoë and her successive changes, on the other hand, can be taken to typify the true life, always a growth and a progress, ever-changing, ever taking on new forms, never at rest but always active. Only so far as life is growth and offers something toward which to move is it of any value. As Browning's Andrea del Sarto says,

Ah, but a man's reach must still exceed his grasp!

Taken in either sense, Wilbrandt's drama will well repay careful study and become a constant source of delight. But I cannot help feeling that it only reaches its truest and greatest appeal and becomes of the utmost value to mankind when we recognize, besides the merely symbolic wealth at our disposal, the doctrine of reincarnation itself as the sanest, the most appealing, and the most helpful solution to the age-long mystery of the Whence and the Whither.

JOHN HERMAN RANDALL, JR.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY